

# Priorities and Strategies

## Operations and Maintenance Priorities



The Lakeshore intends to improve management of its natural resources, including Bass Lake and 26 other inland lakes.

Operations and Maintenance (O&M) includes activities required to carry out everyday park operations. The O&M priorities listed below contribute directly to the park's goals and overall mission. The total cost of implementing these priorities is estimated to be \$1,304,000 million, which represents 82% of the park's \$1.6 million shortfall. These figures do not include the last package titled Operate, Maintain, and Protect Glen Haven Historic District. This package will be needed when restoration of Glen Haven is completed (see page 34). The Lakeshore's top O&M priorities address issues affecting a wide range of programs, including Natural Resource Management, Visitor Safety Services, and Buildings Maintenance and Operations.

### Improve Natural Resources Management \$429,000 and 7.9 FTE

In FY2003 the Natural Resources Management Division was split from the Ranger Division to increase emphasis on resource issues but is presently staffed by only one permanent and one subject to furlough employee. Additional funding is needed to enable the Division to carry out its mission to preserve and protect the Lakeshore's outstanding natural features, as set forth in its enabling legislation. Critical management issues include protection of threatened and endangered species, control of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species, mitigation of human impacts to natural systems, restoration of former homesites, wildland fire management, and water quality monitoring.

### Develop Education and Interpretation Programs \$186,000 and 3.7 FTE

Currently rangers present modified interpretive programs in classrooms during the school year. Funding would support hiring an Education Specialist to develop a curriculum-based program and provide educational outreach, distance learning opportunities, and teacher support. Hiring an Interpretive Specialist and additional

seasonal staff would allow the Lakeshore to keep pace with increased visitation in the shoulder and winter seasons. Offering additional services allows visitors and students to better understand, appreciate, and ultimately protect the Lakeshore's resources.

### Upgrade Visitor and Resource Protection \$298,000 and 4.0 FTE

A rising local population, adjacent land development, and expanding all-season recreational use have increased the Lakeshore's visitor and resource protection responsibilities. Funding would improve law enforcement capabilities by supplementing ranger staff, instituting mainland boat patrols, and improving dispatch capacity.

### Preserve Cultural Landscapes \$90,000 and 1.5 FTE

The Lakeshore has approximately 4,500 acres of cultural landscapes that represent America's farming, maritime, and recreational communities in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The historic agricultural areas, such as those found in the Port Oneida Rural Historic District, are marked by farmsteads that reveal the region's rich agricultural heritage. Although these landscapes have been identified, no provisions have been made for their maintenance. Additional funding would enable the Lakeshore to hire a Cultural Landscape Specialist to identify significant features and develop a comprehensive plan for preservation. Funding would also support a grounds crew to maintain the designated landscapes.

### Maintain and Operate Lakeshore Buildings \$122,000 and 2.6 FTE

Current funding shortfalls do not allow existing staff to properly operate and maintain the 475 structures in the Lakeshore. Although new facilities have been added to the park, staffing levels have not increased to keep up with greater work requirements. As a result, the division has a maintenance backlog approaching \$3 million. Additional



Further rehabilitation, interpretation, and maintenance of the Glen Haven Historic District including the Maritime Museum is a priority for the Lakeshore.

funding would enable the Lakeshore to routinely maintain about 200 structures annually. Activities would include exterior painting of five to seven buildings, minor roof repair and replacement, utility work, and enhanced janitorial operations. These efforts will reduce the deferred maintenance backlog, provide safe and accessible facilities, and enhance visitor use. Routine maintenance of these structures will greatly lessen the need for costly repairs in the future.

#### **Trail, Road, and Hazard Tree Management \$34,000 and .5 FTE**

The roads and trails crew is responsible for maintaining 105 miles of trails, 23 miles of roads, and 700 acres of open fields. In addition, they maintain 14 vista locations and tend to campgrounds and areas surrounding buildings. At a minimum a skilled Tree Worker and Tree Worker Helper are needed to respond to the most urgent of these needs. With additional funding, the Lakeshore would be able to routinely carry out these tasks and implement a plan for vista management and hazardous tree removal.

#### **Emphasize Employee Safety Program \$49,000 and 1.0 FTE**

Overseen only by a collateral duty safety officer, the Lakeshore's safety program complies with safety and environmental standards, but does not provide for an optimal level of employee safety. Management is interested in developing a more comprehensive safety program, led by on-the-ground advisors for each of about 20 program areas, such as confined space entry, respiratory protection, and bloodborne pathogens. Topic-specific programs would include job hazard analyses, a written plan addressing program components, appropriate employee training, adequate equipment, and monitoring to evaluate effectiveness.

#### **Strengthen External Affairs and Partnerships \$58,000 and 0.5 FTE**

The Lakeshore can never fully accomplish its mission without the support and assistance of the American public. By devoting more time and attention to this area, management hopes to better engage the public in its planning and decision-making and to solicit direct support of the park mission through the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships such as project agreements and historic leases.

#### **Expand Information Technology Systems \$38,000 and 1.6 FTE**

The National Park Service is developing and expanding its network of computers, phones, and radio systems to make voice and data information readily accessible, and provide reliable and timely officer safety communication. The Lakeshore will need to upgrade its existing systems in order to utilize these servicewide technologies. Additional funding would enable the park to hire an IT Specialist and expand law enforcement dispatch capability.

#### ***In the future:* Operate, Maintain, and Protect the Glen Haven Historic District, \$390,000 and 4.0 FTE**

The Lakeshore is making significant investments to rehabilitate and interpret the Glen Haven Historic District. New facilities that have already been added include a general store, ranger and maintenance support offices, and restrooms. With its beachside location and unique charm, this picturesque maritime village is a primary visitor attraction. Additional staff time and resources from all divisions are needed to operate and protect this newly restored area. Funding would allow the Lakeshore to maintain over 20 historic structures in good condition, provide services for thousands of visitors annually, operate historical museums, and protect threatened and endangered species.



Additional law enforcement rangers would improve visitor and resource protection at the Lakeshore.



Preservation of cultural landscapes and maintenance of historic buildings are a priority for the Lakeshore.

## Investment Priorities



The Lakeshore intends to devote more funding to scientific research in a variety of fields including aquatic invasive species.



An Environmental Assessment and potential redesign of Overlooks 9 and 10 on the Scenic Drive is an investment priority for the Lakeshore.

Investments are one-time expenditures that improve infrastructure or increase the intellectual capital of the park. Currently the Lakeshore has prepared over 150 requests for National Park Service investment funding, with a total need of nearly \$20 million. The following projects comprise several of the Lakeshore's top investment priorities. Many of these investments are expected to continue indefinitely, but the priorities listed below include needed funding for the next five years.

### Scientific Ecosystems Research Needed Investment: \$1.3 million

Park staff is in constant need of scientific data to guide management decisions, but basic research is often neglected in favor of more pressing management issues. Funding would support several objectives including defining habitat protection requirements for rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species; developing a rapid response to invasive plants before they become too established to eradicate; and determining carrying capacities on Lakeshore rivers and islands in response to increasing use.

### Restoration of Former Homesites & Disturbed Lands Needed Investment: \$1.1 million

Current Lakeshore property includes approximately 1,700 separate tracts of land that have been gradually acquired. As Reservation of Use and Occupancy agreements expire, the park removes all manmade structures such as buildings, fences, and septic tanks from these sites. In the next five years, the park expects to acquire approximately 12 such properties and restore the sites at a cost of about \$10,000 each. In addition, the staff will continue efforts to fully restore previously demolished sites to their natural condition. This includes reconstructing the topography and regenerating native vegetation to restore natural habitats on 30 sites per year at a cost of \$180,000.

### Scenic Drive Overlook Rehabilitation Needed Investment: \$238,000

Every year many visitors come to enjoy the spectacular views of Lake Michigan from the Scenic Drive overlook atop a 450-foot high bluff. Since it was constructed, the platform has required several modifications as the dunes continue to move. Sand is continually blown onto the wooden walkways making footing slippery and requiring frequent clearing and maintenance. Although discouraged from doing so, many visitors descend the steep and dangerous bluff to the lake. This has led to erosion of the very resources that the Lakeshore was designated to protect. This investment would allow the park to complete an Environmental Assessment to address issues of erosion, public access, visitor safety, and interpretation. Based on this analysis, a new overlook access would be designed and built that limits erosion and greatly reduces maintenance costs.

### Restoration of the Glen Haven Historic District Needed Investment: \$1.1 million

Glen Haven has earned its place on the National Register of Historic Places and provides thousands of visitors with the opportunity to understand and appreciate how this 19<sup>th</sup> century lumber and shipping town evolved into an agricultural and tourism center. Funds are anticipated to preserve, stabilize, and rehabilitate six historic structures. In addition, necessary infrastructure, such as parking lots, picnic areas, and interpretive displays, would be built for enhanced visitor use.

### Comprehensive Interpretive Plan Needed Investment: \$35,000

A Comprehensive Interpretive Plan would help the Lakeshore define priorities, identify audiences, and describe the mix of media and personal services best able to provide for visitor enjoyment and education. Specifically, the Lakeshore, outside specialists, and other



stakeholders would work together to define overall vision and goals, including significance of resources, park theme statements, and desired visitor experiences; divide proposed actions into achievable steps; and compile supporting materials including visitor surveys and media inventories.

### **Cultural Resources Stabilization**

**Needed Investment: \$500,000**

Many of the buildings in the park represent a rich agricultural and maritime heritage. Due to funding shortfalls, some of the structures, including those listed on the National Register, have not been repaired or painted in over 15 years. On an annual basis, the Lakeshore hopes to stabilize approximately ten of its historic structures, some of which would be rehabilitated for adaptive use. These efforts are expected to continue until all historic structures throughout the park have been stabilized.

### **Stabilization of the South Manitou Lighthouse**

**Needed Investment: \$346,000**

Constructed in 1871, the South Manitou Lighthouse was an important safety and navigational aid to ships on Lake Michigan. As such, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and serves as a symbolic representation of the Lakeshore, but its worsening condition threatens its existence. Funding would enable the Lakeshore to stabilize the tower, connecting walkway, and keeper's quarters. Complete restoration of the lighthouse complex is a longer term goal and would require approximately \$2.1 million in funding.

### **Equipment Replacement**

**Needed Investment: \$500,000**

Much of the Lakeshore's equipment has long outlasted its useful life and has become costly to maintain, leading to unnecessary downtime and operational inefficiency. This investment would enable the park to replace five pieces of equipment per year with the expectation that eventually the

entire fleet and other costly equipment will be in proper working condition. The most immediate equipment needs include electric carts, water quality monitoring equipment, and multimedia projects for the visitor center.

### **General Management Plan & Other Long Range Plans** **Needed Investment: \$250,000 – 700,000**

Without clear, comprehensive planning documents, the Lakeshore's management team lacks the necessary framework within which to define priorities and make decisions. A new General Management Plan (GMP) will be needed to establish this framework and set direction for other planning efforts. It would analyze many key issues including management of cultural resources, protection of natural resources and visitor experience from increasing area development and use, and management of significant areas added to the Lakeshore since the last GMP was completed. A wilderness study, revised recommendation, and Environmental Impact Statement may also be needed. Additional plans would address management of historic properties, cultural resources, and backcountry use.

### **Long-term Land Acquisition**

**Needed Investment: \$15 million over time**

Currently over 150 parcels of private property remain within the Lakeshore boundary. The park may obtain additional lands within its boundary through gifts, donation, bequest or purchase from willing sellers. An increasing number of landowners want to sell their properties, but current funding levels do not allow the Lakeshore to purchase these lands. This investment would enable the Lakeshore to provide enhanced public use and enjoyment while protecting the overall ecosystems. As mentioned on page 13, these acquisitions are funded through land acquisition appropriations.



A Comprehensive Interpretive Plan would guide improvement of the Lakeshore's campfire programs, ranger-led walks, and other interpretive offerings.



Stabilization of the South Manitou Island lighthouse, built in 1871 and once operated by the US Lifesaving Service, is a major investment priority.

## Strategies for Reducing Costs



Increasing volunteer hours will benefit multiple aspects of Lakeshore operations, including restoration of fragile dune ecosystems and former homesites.



Repair costs for the Lakeshore's aging vehicle fleet totaled \$32,000 in FY2003. Sharing vehicles across divisions and replacing the vehicles in the worst condition could save \$9,000 per year.

Even though the Lakeshore strives to operate as efficiently as possible, there is always room for improvement. The following list represents several possible ways the park could reduce costs in order to free up funding to support mission-critical operations. These figures reflect the Lakeshore's best estimates of each strategy's potential, but may change depending on implementation success.

### Maximize Volunteer and Intern Contributions

Volunteer hours have risen 64% from 16,117 in FY1998 to 26,568 in FY2003 without changing operation of the program. A moderate increase in volunteer management and recruitment effort would bring a significantly greater benefit to the park. Use of a parkwide list of available volunteer positions would improve the program coordinator's ability to match willing workers to needs. Shifting appropriate leadership roles to experienced volunteers would ease the burden on park staff. Raising awareness of volunteer opportunities through popular websites, local organizations, and schools would increase the number of skilled volunteers. Establishing formal internship programs in specialized areas (such as education, GIS, and AutoCAD work with historic structures) fulfills those needs at a lower cost while developing a highly qualified pool of applicants for possible future seasonal positions.

*Estimated net benefit: \$80,000 per year (assuming a 20% increase in volunteer hours)*

### Coordinate Dispatch Operations with Regional Parks

New voiceover Internet Protocol (IP) technology enables long distance communication from handheld radios to a centralized dispatch operation. By partnering with other midwestern parks, Sleeping Bear Dunes would improve coverage while reducing the cost of dispatch operations. Offering round-the-clock dispatch coverage would improve law enforcement ranger safety and better protect

visitors and resources. Other benefits to this system include prevention of unauthorized monitoring through use of encrypted frequencies, reduction in required background investigations, and round-the-clock alarm monitoring and response. Visitors would also be able to report non-emergency incidents through a toll-free telephone number.

*Estimated net benefit: \$44,000 per year*

### Conserve Energy

The Lakeshore is investigating technologies to reduce its energy usage, protect the environment, and lower utility costs. These expenses have increased dramatically over the years and totaled \$135,000 in FY2003. Northern Michigan's winters are long and cold. Although the park's operations greatly decrease during winter, buildings are still occupied and must be heated for use. The HVAC systems at the four administrative buildings are not set at a standard temperature and fluctuate greatly. Maintaining temperatures constant at about 70 degrees year-round would decrease utility costs by 20% to 30%, realizing savings of approximately \$11,000 annually. Eventually, the park hopes to utilize natural gas vehicles and geothermal heat pumps to further decrease its energy use.

*Estimated net benefit: \$11,000 per year after first year*

### Maintain Landscapes through Volunteers and Leasing

Like all natural systems, the open field cultural landscapes at the Lakeshore are not static. Immediate action on about 700 acres is necessary to prevent establishment of woody vegetation and eventual reversion to hardwood forest. A variety of methods could be considered to accomplish this, including mowing on a cyclical rotation, leasing for hay production, and prescribed fire. Enlisting volunteers or a lessee to mow these fields would maintain the landscapes while relieving the burden on staff.

*Estimated net benefit: \$10,000 per year*

### **Increase Staff Retention**

The Lakeshore has experienced some staff turnover, particularly among fee collectors and law enforcement rangers. Due to the furlough period or short seasons of most positions and opportunities elsewhere, it is challenging to retain a skilled workforce. In addition to the cost of recruitment and hiring, new staff also requires training and other administrative support. The Lakeshore could ensure retention by helping employees secure NPS positions elsewhere during the winter season or by sharing employees between divisions. In FY2003 the Lakeshore hired 25 new seasonal employees, which represents 30% of the seasonal workforce. Reducing turnover by about 12% and retaining three more employees (one law enforcement ranger and two fee collectors) could realize savings of up to \$10,000 annually. In addition to administrative cost savings, retaining staff boosts morale, promotes greater growth potential, and increases operational efficiencies.

*Estimated net benefit: Up to \$10,000 per year*

### **Replace and Eliminate Costly Excess Vehicles**

Currently, the Lakeshore has 46 Interior-owned and 17 leased vehicles. Despite including fuel and routine maintenance costs, leases are costly, amounting to \$68,000 in FY2003. The park-owned fleet, while generally more economical, has aged, often resulting in heavy repair costs which totaled \$32,000 in FY2003. Although all existing vehicles are used by staff to some extent, many are needed for only a few hours each day and sit idle the remainder of the time. Establishing a vehicle schedule that shows usage across divisions would enable the Lakeshore to consolidate its fleet and reduce transportation costs. Currently at least one of the leased vehicles might be shared throughout the day, saving the Lakeshore approximately \$1,400 annually. Additionally, purchasing two vehicles to replace leased units could realize savings of approximately \$6,600 once the park

breaks even on its investment. Lastly, an analysis of the Interior-owned vehicles from FY2003 shows that at least eight accumulated less than \$200 of fuel costs, indicating fairly low use. With a share program for vehicles, the park would be able to eliminate at least four of these cars with the highest maintenance costs, realizing a benefit of \$1,000.

*Estimated net benefit: \$9,000 per year*

### **Enhance Website Content and Design**

An increasing number of visitors are using the Lakeshore's website to learn about the park, plan their visit before they arrive, and explore employment and volunteer opportunities. Improving the website content, design, and ease of navigation would have a positive impact on several aspects of Lakeshore operations. Potential content additions include downloadable hiking trail maps, a "hot topics" section in which the public could learn about current issues in the Lakeshore, and a place to make donations. These changes would reduce printing costs, decrease administrative support time, and enhance an important visitor service.

*Estimated net benefit: \$6,000 per year*

### **Fund Forest Restoration through Sale of Timber**

Created mostly from private lands, the Lakeshore now owns over 400 acres of pine plantations established in the last century. These non-native forest types have limited ecological value in terms of wildlife habitat and biological diversity. These monocultures are also especially susceptible to fire, as well as insect and disease outbreaks. The NPS mission to restore natural communities and processes would be achieved by returning these areas to native hardwood forest. Sale of the pine timber would fund restoration efforts including site preparation and hardwood planting at no cost to the Lakeshore.

*Estimated net benefit: Restoration of natural communities and processes at no cost.*



Maintaining constant indoor temperatures during the region's long, cold winters would reduce utility bills.



Reducing turnover among seasonal staff, primarily fee collectors and law enforcement rangers, could save up to \$10,000 per year.



## Strategies for Increasing Non-Appropriated Funding



Charging a use fee for ranger-led commercial tours on the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive is one of many cost recovery activities that would increase reimbursable funding.



Increasing visitation in the offseason would raise Lakeshore revenues without significantly increasing operating costs.

The Lakeshore has the potential to generate additional revenue through cash and in-kind donations, user fees, and cost recovery. While government appropriations will remain limited and competitive, private fund sources are less restricted. Implementation of the following suggestions would increase revenues at a minimal cost to the Lakeshore. These figures reflect the park's best estimates of each strategy's potential, but may change depending on implementation success.

### Increase Visitation in the Offseason

Even though it is a national treasure, the splendor of the Lakeshore is little known outside of Michigan. While it is arguably most pleasant to visit the Lakeshore in the summer, other seasons offer different kinds of beauty and their own noteworthy activities. Expanding visitation in the winter and other periods of low visitation would increase revenues without significant cost to the Lakeshore. Additional benefits include improved intern recruitment, volunteerism rates, and outside support of the park mission.

*Estimated net benefit: \$66,000 per year (assuming a 10% visitation increase from November through April)*

### Enhance Partnerships

In recent years, the Lakeshore has greatly enhanced its relationships with partner groups, which are an integral part of the park's success. These groups of committed individuals have served as local advocates, and their efforts to secure resources to further their missions have benefitted the park as well. The park intends to continue expanding these relationships in the future and to consistently collaborate with partners to find new ways to generate funding to meet our mission. Direction of additional time toward this effort would enhance existing relationships and provide better opportunities and guidance for partner groups. Supplying partners with a

list of projects would improve fundraising abilities and allow interested members of the community to donate funds for specific investments that appeal to them. With the required staff and resources, the Lakeshore would also be able to establish new ties with the community. This region offers a wealth of resources, and a number of local nonprofits share common goals with the Lakeshore. Such organizations would expand fundraising efforts and solicit grants to support special projects and initiatives for the park. A specific need has been identified to seek local groups that would champion the park's natural resource issues. The Lakeshore is one of the top ten tourist destinations in the state of Michigan because of its spectacular natural beauty. A newsletter, created and distributed through a local nonprofit, would increase awareness of issues that currently threaten these resources.

In the past five years, partner groups have made approximately \$60,000 of cash or in-kind donations to the Lakeshore annually. Doubling the current efforts toward partnerships is expected to bring an additional \$60,000 to the park. The management team is also investigating the possibility of a historic leasing program that enables the park to lease its buildings at fair market value to groups with a compatible mission. This would not only bring additional funds to the park, but it would also reduce operational costs by eliminating certain building maintenance needs.

*Estimated net benefit: \$51,000 per year*

### Increase Fee Collection

Established in 1997, the Fee Demonstration Program enables the Lakeshore to keep 80% of the fees it collects for projects that benefit park resources or visitors. In FY2003 approximately one million people visited Sleeping Bear Dunes generating \$633,000 in revenues. However, because of

the Lakeshore's numerous access points, many people visit the park without purchasing a pass. Currently, visitors can buy passes at the nine most popular destinations, but several other locations do not provide fee collection mechanisms. The Lakeshore is investigating the placement of "iron rangers," or automated fee collection stations, at three additional locations: Esch Road, North Bar Lake, and Pyramid Point. Based on the number of passes purchased at various VenTek machines last year, it is estimated that this would result in approximately 1,500 more purchased passes. Excluding the initial investment and operational expenses, the park will realize \$5,500 in revenues annually. Should this project be successful, the Lakeshore might install additional iron rangers at other locations. The park has also identified a need for fee collection staff at the newly-improved Glen Haven facilities. This historic district is an increasingly popular tourist attraction and draws approximately 25,000 visitors annually. It is estimated that this location would generate \$10,000 in additional revenues.

Several special events are held at the Lakeshore throughout the year, but there is no current mechanism in place for attendees to purchase park passes. On average 5,500 people attend the two largest events, the Port Oneida Fair and the Dune Climb concert. It is estimated that approximately 1,400 additional park passes would be sold at these two events, which, when adjusted for administrative costs, would bring \$12,700 in revenues to the park.

*Estimated net benefit: \$28,000 per year after first year*

### **Expand Cost Recovery Program**

Currently the Lakeshore expends special effort to accommodate certain visitor groups and special park uses. For example, interpretive rangers regularly accompany commercial bus tours on the Scenic Drive. The

park could charge a fee for this special service to a commercial group. In addition the Lakeshore charges an application fee for processing permits for special uses like weddings, but sometimes absorbs other costs associated with these events such as clean-up or traffic control. Implementing formal procedures for recovering these costs would help the park ensure that these special uses do not have a negative impact on its ability to provide other visitor services. Lastly the Lakeshore operates a firing range for law enforcement rangers to practice and maintain qualifications. Currently more than 10 other law enforcement organizations also use this facility. The soil has been contaminated by lead from spent ammunition and should be cleaned up. Other users should help defray the cost of operating the range to enable the Lakeshore to continue providing this service.

*Estimated net benefit: \$3,000 per year*

### **Increase Eastern National Sales**

Eastern National's three outlets at the Visitor Center, Dune Climb, and Glen Haven General Store help the Lakeshore increase visitor understanding and appreciation of its resources. Taking a more active role in choosing and developing sales items has the potential to both further the Lakeshore's interpretive mission and increase the percent donation it receives from sales. For example, developing frameable prints, postcards, and other items from the more than 20 pieces of art that the Lakeshore has received through the Artist-in-Residence program would allow visitors to take some of the Lakeshore's beauty home with them and increase revenues.

*Estimated net benefit: \$3,000 per year*



Enhancing partnerships, such as barn restoration workshops, furthers the missions of both the Lakeshore and its partner groups.



Rising visitation at the Glen Haven General Store and other attractions in the area make it a logical place to begin collecting visitor use fees.